

“Theatrical”

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The relationship between theatre and architecture was not always evident.

Theatre is an ephemeral art. It's bound to a limited time - the representation - while architecture is perennial.

Despite this dichotomy, the theatricality in man and in architecture has always been present, although with different manifestations (sometimes hidden, obvious and / or enhanced), but always in line with Time.

The different epochs have been producing and crystallizing the relationships of man. And theatre, as a mirror, kept playing their texts, their dances, their movements, words and forms of expression while building the audience and the places and rising buildings to accomplish its goals.

“Seeing and being seen, understanding and making ourselves understood is the fatal circle of humanity, being an actor and spectator is the condition of human life,” said Charles Garnier (1825/1898), and we might add, of the architecture in its deepest meaning.

The quest to create a whole, to establish communication, become an accomplice for a moment, a group, an audience, a public, reveals that “the great moments of the theatre are produced in laughter and silence - when the audience acts as one person”. (R., Jun., 1961)

The theatre, before being the place of image, is the place of concepts, of words spoken from a man to an audience, the place of deep reflection on the intelligence of bodies in real action. Prior to being entertainment, distraction, it is a disturbing place of human reason and moral necessity of collective inquiry.

In here, man has contact with his destiny, achieves reality with sensations, and through the sensual reaches understanding.

Inner feelings are the ground for communion, contemplation, testimony of a dreamily truth, reflection of the sense of the world.

The universe presents itself for an hour or two with the power to thrill. Art and reality merge. Man is at the same time in the world, in the presence of the world, and connected to a group; at the same time and in the same space he participates in temporal and spatial perceptions that, as a committed whole, build the ambiguity of the theatrical fact.

The theatrical fact, so close to man, presents itself with neither past nor future, only an involvement, a portion of reality where the theories are abolished and dissolved, where time and space take the value of eternity and drama's space is, above all, uneasiness, forgetfulness, serenity, fun, waiting, loneliness and communion.

“Here man is aware of his destiny; he knows the constraints that dominate life, sees realities through the form of eternity; he can't reject anything, here, the terrible and serenity are sought

under appearances. Misfortune, misery, melancholy, pain, cruelty, mystery, fatality, human conflict are the first expression of the dramatic feeling in its birth.” (Rainer Maria Rilke, ap R., Jr., 1961)

The building is testimony of the secret agreement of different thoughts established by those who contemplate and listen; at the bottom of a cavity, of a shell, an auditorium, or a room, those who act, represent and portray themselves to their equals.

Two extremes kept in peculiar geometry, complement themselves and are interdependent. One cannot exist without the other (the imbalance from one side to the other will perceive the transformation of the dramatic building) and the space has its own meaning, confers a development that is not only that of the actor, but also that of all those who participate and give birth to the act.

The comparison between the temple and the cathedral occurs naturally, through the living translation of the desire of wanting to be absorbed by the place where “all that a man has in himself is distilled. This is where one can find the nature’s virginity, where all the aspirations are obscurely condensed and the blind fate where the divine exists waves without being able to achieve it.” (J. Muntañola, 1978)

The Theatre, seen as the realm of the imaginary and the mythic, is built for the word, for the movement, for light and space and it ends the clash of two strange, yet necessary, worlds; the fictional world where drama, ballet, opera, comedy or farce can be included; and the real world, which absorbs and dissipates itself in its context.

The building becomes a virtual reality and the illusion is a deep sense of space that is characterized through the excellence of the ephemeral. That is, the greater the ability to render the concrete place in an imaginary place, the more theatrical phenomenon can be seen.

It is from the dramatic building that we realize that the theatrical phenomenon is not only spectacle, but an event that transcends the place itself.

And the deserted building, in the arena or in the amphitheatre, conveys a strange involvement, an organized disorder, a primitive and unique feeling where the place’s silence and emptiness, breathes (echoes) events where appearances are captured, and the memories and memory stimulate the imaginary.

The sense the emptiness of the place conveys, growing aware of the body participation as a space within a space, leads us to experience “a vague discomfort with a desire to be absorbed by the place.” (R., Jun., 1961) And the dramatical place is transformed through its own perception’s transfiguration.

J. Muntañola (1978) states that the resemblance between theatre and architecture is a dangerous one if you do not realize the differences between theatrical performance and to inhabit “the scenario is not the architecture that separates the spectators from the actors, but what separates and unfolds all bodies in spectators and actors of themselves.”

The Theatre performs this attitude from an “inwardness” of the viewer or “alienation” of the actor; it wouldn’t be possible otherwise, however you take the experience to its limits - an actor without spectators, or a spectator without actors. In architecture, a single body is an actor and spectator, externalized and internalized.

In stage design or in space’s dramatization the strategies are much more “theatrical” and sensual, leaving the space available to future formalizations. And the dilemma between

perceptual phenomenology and conceptualization, or between stage setting, body, actor / spectator, takes into account the overlap of the implicit and intelligible over what is sensitively perceived.

The dialectic between these two spaces, the sensible and the intelligible, and between actor and spectator and their reciprocity in a verbal context, is the essence of the theatrical phenomenon, and their interdependence (or disguised dialectic) is the manifestation of a fundamental nature from and to man, expressed in complicity in defining the boundaries of reality and illusion in the construction of meaning and signs.

The architecture provides the theatre, not the building, not a feature but a process of thought and a way of seeing that is fundamental to the characterization of a new aesthetics' construction, a new plastic and a new identity or understanding of the place theatre, whose history is still to be made.

The project's methodology, the control of materials and their qualities, the accuracy of design, the process' definition is an asset brought by architecture to stage design, which is now understood as a territory invaded by architects.

On the other hand, experimenting the drawing, the test's facility, the speed of construction and the imposition of a decision-making capacity, were also an asset brought to architecture and architects by the theatre.

The emotional project, filled with words and people, the inhabited place, the space without clients, no references or context, or rather, the text as a context, presents itself to architecture as a new frame of reference. New, especially that kind of architecture still loyal to a certain way of doing, to a speech, to a school, which tells us that the "solution is in place," that "the process is the drawing" and that "architecture is the present". I quoted Siza, Alves Costa and Távora.

In a way, it is through this opposing perspectives that the study and work on the scenic space reveals itself important, not only due to the work itself but also due to the process of creating new working methodologies that architecture can and should develop itself. A new agenda and new interests of Contemporary Architecture.

The set design, or stage space design promotes and encourages the transgression of the conventions, leads to experimentation, develops a dramaturgical and plastic reading of objects and, as a method of creating, it proposes a cross-disciplinary knowledge from other distinct fields of knowledge and different artistic and human activities. And this, we are certain, can only enrich architecture's subject.

However, there's a question remaining, a question that I have been asking myself over these past working years as an architect and set designer in several stage sets for the drama of our existence...

Won't it be proud-spirited, (?) the lofty stare of the architect when he brings to the stage his architecture, differentiating, solving problems, creating spaces, creating shows? But is this "scenery"? Is this dramatic space? Is this scenic "architecture" or only a visit, an event, an installation, an intuition ... a three-dimensional image, which is generally assumed as a concrete metaphor for an idea? That is a record contrary to the process and the understanding we have of the production of ideas and the discovery of the solution – the method in architecture.

Oscar Niemeyer said that beauty in architecture alone is justified. Now that we know how easy it is to accomplish the beautiful and that it is possible to expand this knowledge to many other areas, and we are looking for other concepts - like surprise, different materials, the sensations of the material, excitement, experimentation and new phenomena of communication - we realize that architecture as a subject is shifting towards images' production and not towards

construction. “Meaningless,” said João Pedro Serôdio in an academic test, when he compares this process of producing architectures, which is the result of new images with the purpose of producing new images, where architecture, as we understand it, doesn't seem to exist.

And so the interest and the timeliness of studies on Scenography, on scenic spaces, on the almost new architectural spaces, on the new buildings, almost scenographic, seeking to question and to know the boundaries of architecture, especially at a time like this when one watches a remarkable paradigm shift.

So, the words that Thomas Bernhard left us by the voice of Minetti, an actor abandoned in a hall of a Ostend's hotel, waiting for a theatre director (or a client that is not arriving) that will give him the part of his life (or the piece that never comes) and says: “we spend our lives doing, that we do things that nobody understands. But this is our path and not another, this one and only this one, until we're dead, we remain our whole life without knowing if it will be mathematics, or theatrical art, ... Pure madness, my lady.” still seem to be true, both for the actor as for the architect.

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